

Examining the opportunities for establishing a national training program for practice educators in social work education

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Social Care Council Research Network talk

The state of the social work profession

Greater supply of newly qualified social workers required to meet existing service needs and fill vacancies resulting from social workers retiring out of the sector (Social Workers Registration Board, 2022).

Recruitment and retention has been identified as the biggest challenge for the profession (Social Workers Registration Board 2024).

The 2025 Workforce Insight Report noted the importance of having enough social workers '*with the right skills, knowledge and competencies in the right place*'.

Implications for social work education

Importance of adequate training and development including the provision of sufficient quality placements for students and having sufficient skilled social workers to effectively support the teaching and learning of students during placement.

Internationally, research has captured the challenges of inconsistent placement learning opportunities (Cleak et al., 2022) and emphasizing how “good or poor practices impact students' ethical behaviour and practice accordingly” (Papouli, 2014, p. 10), shaping their graduate skills (Ayala et al., 2014)

The role of the practice educator (PE) has been identified as “One of the biggest determinants of a quality practicum” (Hay, 2020, p. 56), yet there is competition between education providers as there are limited placement providers and PEs (Hay, 2018).

Phase one: National survey

“I don't think they look at this as an issue”

Aim: Mapping the training and development needs of practice educators/social workers supervising students on placement in Aotearoa social work.

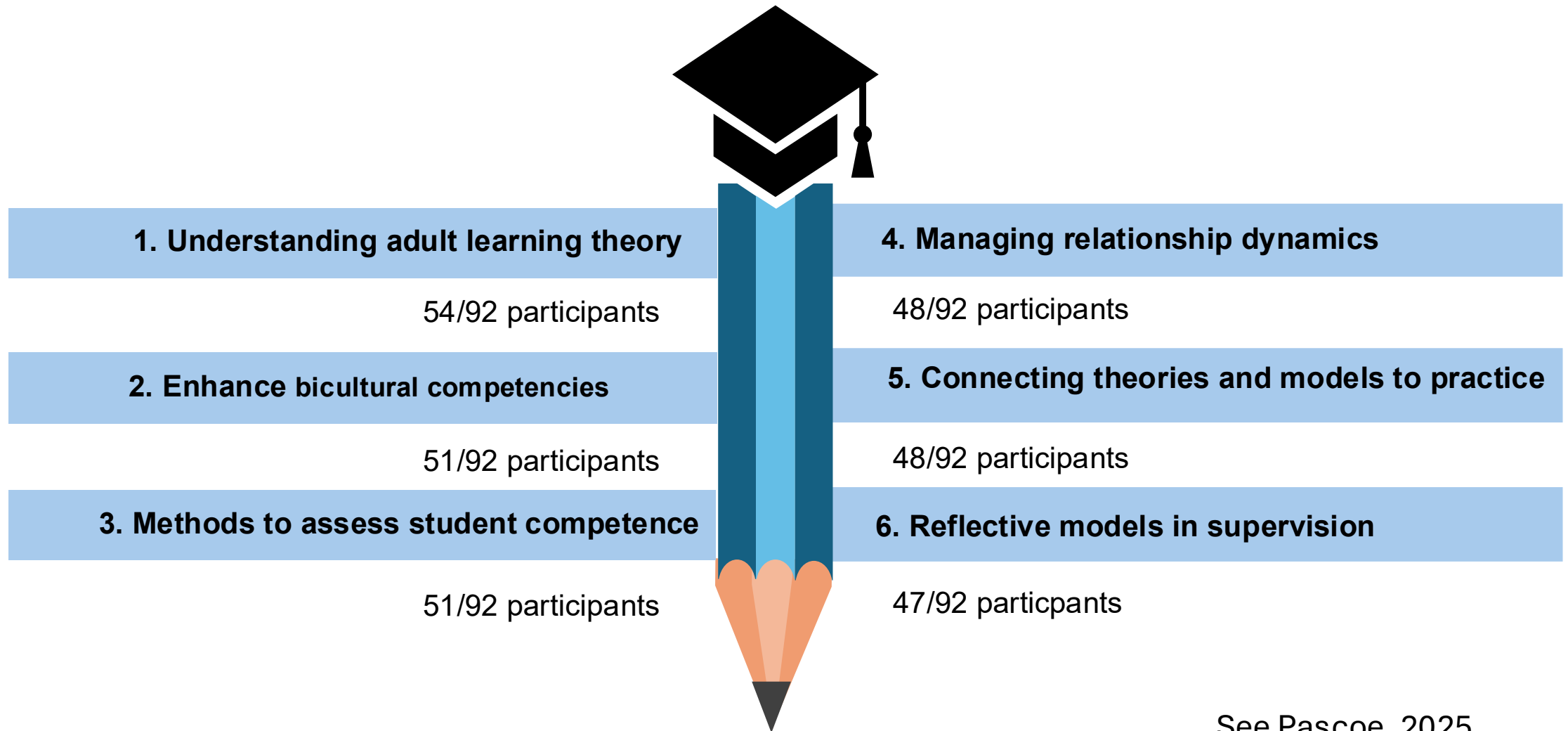
Recruitment: Emailed out to through 4 Universities and 2 Polytechnics and circulated through professional networks

Final sample: 136 responses
Experience: 1st time supervising to more than 10 students



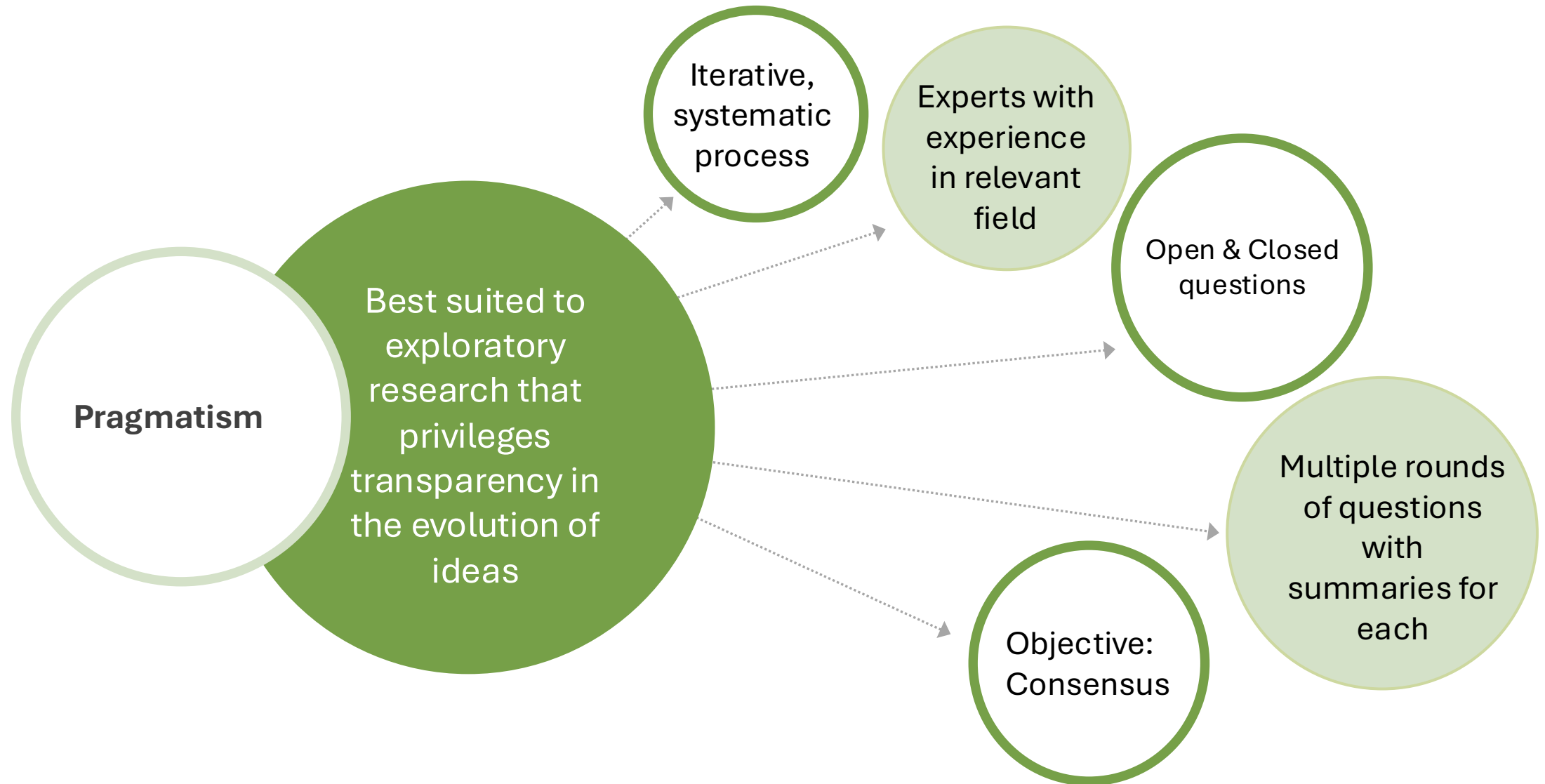
What topics for training and development are wanted?

Only 46% of respondents had an induction



See Pascoe, 2025

Delphi panel



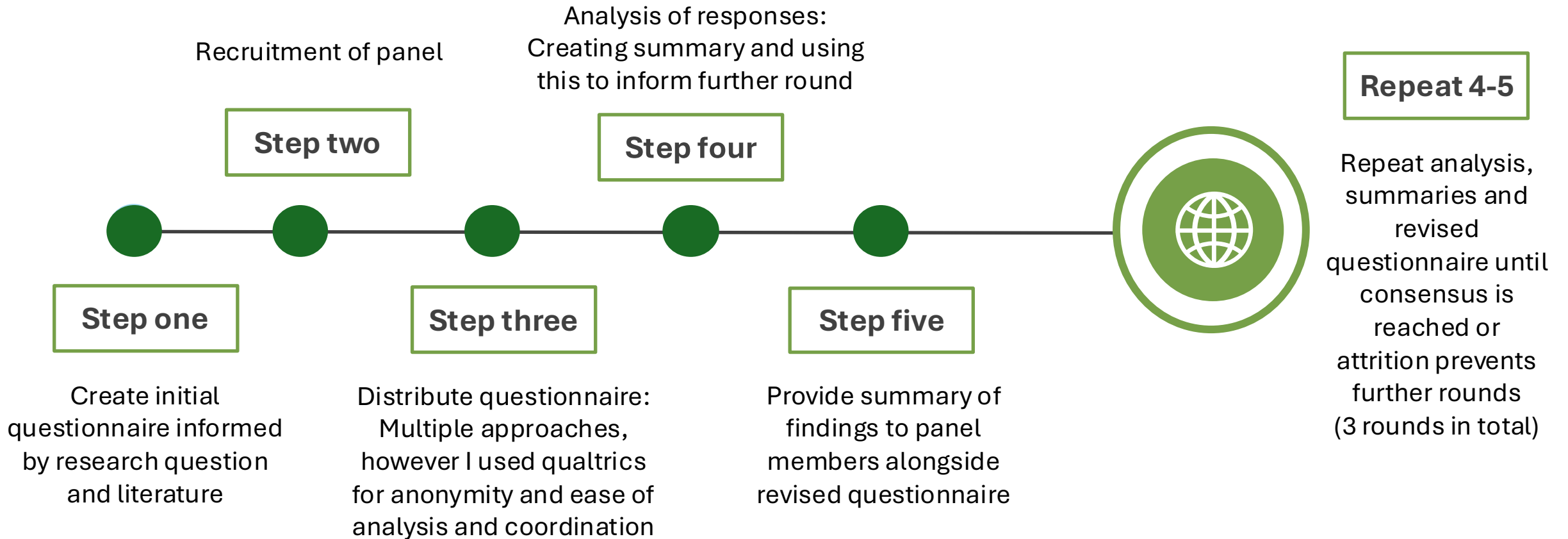
Uses

Typically used in curriculum development and broader educational research for establishing standards, guidelines and policies (Green, 2014; Linstone & Turnoff, 1975; Martinez-Sanchez, 2021; Sitlington & Coetzer, 2015), specifically, medicine and nursing (Barrett & Heale, 2020; Chuenjitwongsa, 2017; Elman et al., 2020; Keeley et al., 2006).

The use of a Delphi panel in social work education and research is less common.

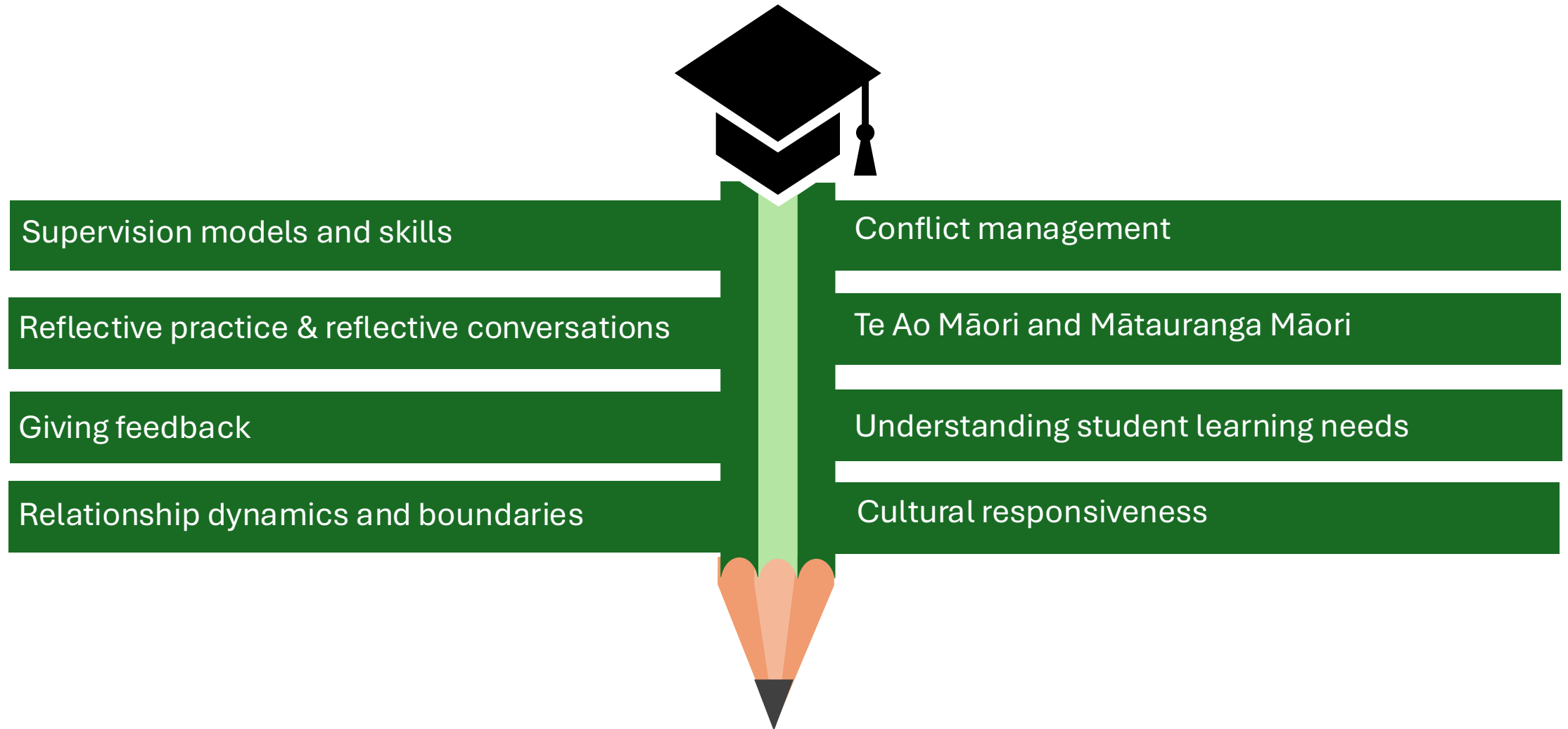
- Forensic social work in Australia (Lattas et al., 2024). Interviews and 2 rounds.
- Performance indicators for Field Education (Jefferies, Davis & Mason, 2023): 3 rounds.
- Global study to develop a research agenda for social work supervision (Beddoe et al., 2015) reports on first round.

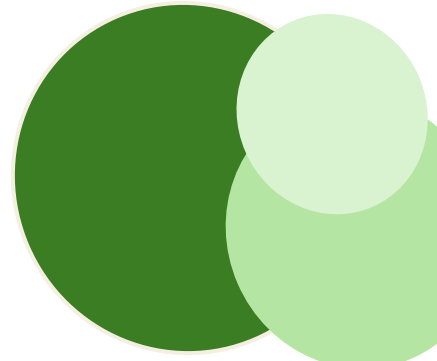
Process



Delphi panel results

An emerging curriculum



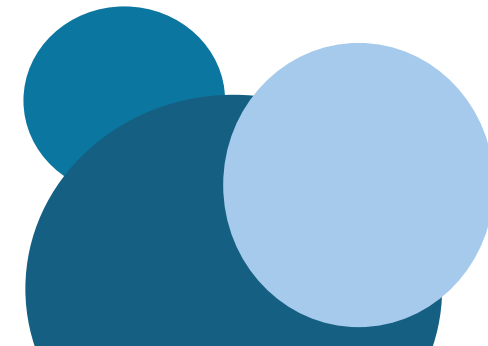
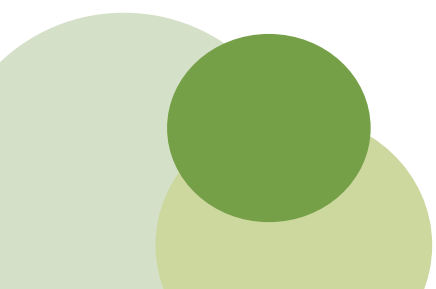


Areas of agreement

- Training and development is essential for the role, but responsibility is shared
- Key curriculum elements identified
- Funding feasibility: Government resourcing to ensure sustainability. Costs should not fall to the individual given the contribution to workforce development and profession sustainability
- Hybrid delivery

Tensions remained around who should be designing, delivering, accrediting and regulating such a program.

Any targeted development requires a coordinated macro level response to achieve decent work and a sustainable workforce



Methodological learnings



Does not seek to be representative

Can capture a range of perspectives but is not statistically representative



Size is widely debated

Can range from a few to over 50. Size should align with the aim of the study and inclusion/exclusion criteria. Influenced by resourcing and time.



No strict rule on number of rounds

Determined by responses, sit in this discomfort



Risk of dropout

Where did all the respondents go?

Clear communication, timelines and expectations. Emphasis on contribution

Methodological learnings



Controlled participation

Snowballing can risk the validity of the findings: Who gets to participate and who does not? Please do not share the link.



To what extent can we uphold anonymity?

As a small industry, there is a risk that others may guess who is participating or inadvertently speak to one another about the study, but responses are anonymized. Quasi-anonymity?



Conceptualizing consensus

Some studies argue a majority vote, whilst others have used an 80% cut off, yet, some have proceeded with 100% agreement. Is consensus the same as someone not protesting the outcome, or choosing to stop participating when you disagree? (Keeley et al., 2006)



Fair and equitable communication?

Reduces the risk of an individual dominating discussion and reduces apprehension of revealing identity, however, can be a barrier for individuals, communities and cultures that value dynamic, circular thinking and dialogue.

Interested in the Delphi panel method?



Pascoe, K.M. (2026). Using a Delphi panel in qualitative social work research: From conceptualizing consensus and defining expertise to systematic processes and quasi anonymity. *Qualitative Social Work*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14733250261476986>



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